Annual report on the activities of the European Ombudsman in 2012

2013/2051(INI) - 15/07/2013 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Petitions adopted the own initiative report by Nikolaos SALAVRAKOS (EFD, EL) on the annual report on the activities of the European Ombudsman 2012. Members approve the annual report for 2012 presented by the European Ombudsman, and note that Mr Diamandouros will retire on 1 October 2013. They express their gratitude for his exemplary work as European Ombudsman over the past ten years to both strengthen and deepen the dialogue with citizens, civil society, the institutions and other stakeholders at all levels.

Complaints in 2012: the report notes that in 2012, the Ombudsman registered **2 442 complaints** and that it was a record year in terms of both inquiries opened (465 = +18 % compared with 2011) and inquiries closed (390 = +23 %). It appears that 52.7 % of inquiries opened in 2012 concerned the European Commission, 5.2 % the European Parliament, 3.0 % the European External Action Service, 1.5 % the European Investment Bank and 20.9 % other EU institutions, agencies or bodies. **In 82 % of cases the EU institutions comply with the Ombudsman's suggestions.**

However, Members note that the **number of inquiries opened in 2012 concerning the European Parliament almost doubled compared with 2011**. They call on Parliament's Secretariat to cooperate fully with the Ombudsman and ensure compliance and consistency with his recommendations and comments regarding administrative practices.

Helping citizens to know their rights: the report notes that 52 % of European citizens consider that the Ombudsman's most important function is to ensure that EU citizens know their rights and how to use them, and that therefore the Ombudsman needs to **improve visibility and communication with Europe's citizens** and enhance cooperation with the European Network of Ombudsmen.

Members call for the requisite steps to be taken to accelerate the procedures for investigating complaints, conducting enquiries and taking decisions.

Improving administrative transparency: the committee recalls the fact that 42 % of European citizens are not satisfied with the level of transparency in the EU administration, and highlights the need for the Ombudsman to continue his efforts in **helping the EU institutions become more open, effective and citizen-friendly, building bridges between the institutions and citizens**.

In this context, Members remain concerned about **the large number of complaints regarding openness, public access and personal data.**

They reiterate that transparency, openness, access to information, respect for the rights of citizens, and high ethical standards are essential for maintaining trust between citizens and the institutions.

Members consider that the decrease in the total number of complaints submitted to the Ombudsman in 2012 is further proof of the **success of the interactive guide on his website**, which is designed to help ensure that fewer citizens complain to the Ombudsman for the wrong reason. The report recognises the important contribution of the **European Network of Ombudsmen**. It commends the Ombudsman on his initiative of publishing a set of **public-service principles**, which should guide the conduct of EU civil servants. It welcomes the fact that in June 2013 the Ombudsman published a new edition of the **European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour.**

Promoting fundamental rights: Members welcome the Ombudsman's participation, alongside Parliament's Committee on Petitions, the European Disability Forum, the Commission and the Fundamental Rights Agency, in the EU-level Framework, relating to the implementation of the UN Convention on the **Rights of Persons with Disabilities**. It also welcomes the Ombudsman's efforts to safeguard the implementation of the **Charter of Fundamental Rights** by the EU's institutions.

Lastly, the committee reiterates the call made in its resolution of 15 January 2013 on the Commission to adopt **common binding rules and principles on administrative procedure** in the EU's administration and to present a draft regulation to this end on the basis of Article 298 TFEU. It considers that this would be the best way to ensure lasting change in the administrative culture of the EU institutions.